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ABSTRACT

The teacher, as an authority figure in the computer classroom, can choose from a number of types of interactions with students to counteract homophobic comments as well as racial and gender prejudice. A model of four responses to student communication in the InterChange computer framework sets a continuum of teacher control: (1) passive response--the teacher lets students converse with and police each other; (2) participatory response--the teacher comments as a participant in discussion, but not in a "supervisory" manner; (3) intervening response--the teacher comments on remarks made by students to redirect or set the terms of discussion, or to ask pointed questions; and (4) dominating response--the teacher may ask everyone in the class to halt discussion until the teacher has written a response on the screen. The rhetoric of computer mediated instruction often implies an analogy between "totalitarianism" and dominating approaches in which the teacher does not trust students to come up with adequate responses or interpretations. It also implies an association between "democracy" and instructor pedagogy which exhibits faith in the consensus of the majority. However, this rhetoric of democracy can be turned around: a strategy of intervention by a teacher to ensure the inclusion of marginalized perspectives may be viewed as "democratic" by those whose viewpoints were not being validated, or by anyone who values a relatively prejudice-free environment. (Fourteen notes are included, of which several are extensive conversational exchanges.) (NH)

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RETHINKING TEACHER AUTHORITY TO COUNTERACT PREJUDICE IN DISCUSSIONS OF GAY/LESBIAN/BISEXUAL REPRESENTATION: A MODEL OF TEACHER RESPONSE IN THE NETWORKED COMPUTER CLASSROOM

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RETHINKING TEACHER AUTHORITY TO COUNTERACT PREJUDICE IN DISCUSSIONS OF GAY/LESBIAN/BISEXUAL REPRESENTATION: A MODEL OF TEACHER RESPONSE IN THE NETWORKED COMPUTER CLASSROOM

While I remain enthusiastic about the democratizing potential of the networked classroom, in the following I focus on the negative potential of real-time writing in this environment. I consider how instructors can counteract homophobic comments in particular, though the steps I suggest relate intrinsically to counteracting racial and gender prejudice as well.

First, I want to stress the role of the teacher as an authority figure in the computer classroom.[1] Especially because teachers use their authority to address (or contribute to) the problems of prejudice in the classroom, it would help to analyze the types of interaction teachers have with their students. In the context of the networked classroom, I use a schema suggested by Locke Carter (personal communication, March 10, 1992) for locating teacher response to student communication in the Daedalus InterChange discussion program, used in the Division of Rhetoric and Composition's computer classrooms at the University of Texas at Austin.[2]

Carter (personal communication, March 10, 1992), one of the three designers of InterChange, offers a model of four responses to student communication in InterChange, set on a continuum of teacher control:

1. Passive response. The teacher lets students converse with and police each other.

2. Participatory response. The teacher comments as a participant in discussion, but not in a "supervisory" manner.

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3. Intervening response. The teacher comments on remarks made by students to redirect or set the terms of discussion, or to ask pointed questions.

4. Dominating response. The teacher may ask everyone in the class to halt discussion until the teacher has written a response--essentially asking them to stop "talking," and making them "listen" on the screen until the teacher has said what he or she wants the students to hear.[3]

In this model, I locate my own teaching behavior as shifting between "intervening," "participatory," and "passive" response. The "passive" response for me is akin to a "default" setting when, for example, three conversations are happening simultaneously and I can participate in only one at a time.

What should be added to this model to account for behavior and interactions in InterChange, are the broader contextual clues the teacher provides in determining the topic to be discussed, and the range of acceptable or unacceptable responses which instructors allude to explicitly or implicitly in off-line discussion or material.[4] Carter (personal communication, March 28, 1993) notes that while an instructor's interaction may be considered "participatory," with slight guidance offered during the class discussion, the actual involvement of the instructor may be underestimated as much preparation work occurs before class, when the instructor sets up the curriculum and particular assignment.

Marshall Kremers (1990) also posits a model of teacher interaction with students in discussion programs in the electronic classroom. He describes a teacher "intervention," and "non-intervention" model of interaction. Kremers says he does not want to use the network to "dominate" students, though he finds it necessary at times

to "intervene in the network conversations" when a kind of "mutiny" goes on with students writing "a lot of garbage, some of it obscene" (1990, p.35).

It is significant that in the non-intervention model Kremers posits, wherein a "synchronous network can create a naturally teacherless classroom," he has "one basic rule: to provide contexts for student interaction that let them express their natural creativity" (1990, p.38). After developing role-playing scenarios linked to an essay topic, Kremers turns the network "completely over to the students" (1990, p.39). Yet the non-intervention model Kremers describes still entails a measure of instructor control in his determination of the role-playing scenario students will use to start a networked discussion. Overall though, in his teaching practice, Kremers occupies what he describes as a "reasonable middle-ground between teacher domination and total freedom" (1990, p.39), a middle ground which I also aim for.

The difference I have with Kremers (1990) is mainly one of emphasis; he focusses on the ways in which students thrive in an open atmosphere with less rigid teacher controls in their discussion, while I am concerned at present with the ways in which students are hurt by the lack of instructor intervention.[5] In a similar vein, E. Laurie George (1990) encourages the responsible use of instructor authority in the computer classroom to counter unproductive discussion. Says George, "if I am to "ride the beast" that Marshall Kremers and, before him, Trent Batson speak of...I must also keep in mind that the beast, harnessed by patriarchal norms it cannot see, will make abrupt and sometimes brutal turns. If it is my responsibility to lead us to a safe destination where someday we might unbridle ourselves--and I do believe that is my responsibility--then I must keep us on course by taking seriously my authority to control those reins" (1990, p.50).

To describe how instructors take additional measures to influence networked discussion, I would add to Carter's schema (personal communication, March 10, 1992) by broadening the 4th type of teacher response, dominating response, and locating this not only in the context of InterChange, but in the context of teacher-student interaction outside of this particular program. With this broader-based definition, I would encourage the use of dominating responses to counteract wilding, flaming, and instances of sexist, racist, or homophobic comments.

In my classroom practice, I have found it necessary to go beyond the bounds of the real-time discussion framework of InterChange to set the terms for classroom discussion. I have twice taught an elective writing course on the Rhetoric of Victimization in 20th century American drama.[6] I cover 7 plays in the course and for each, I assign a set of students to develop seed questions to start 3-4 different discussions in InterChange.

One of the plays I teach which deals most directly with gay/lesbian/bisexual representation, is Martin Sherman's Bent, a successful Broadway play which has been produced in 30 countries. Bent was written in the late 1970's and deals with the experience of homosexuals in World War II and the relationships among several men. Male characters kiss and embrace in the play, and describe sexual fantasies in two scenes.

I did not want to begin an InterChange discussion on Bent without providing at least one framework for understanding conceptions of homosexuality. Overall, I took four steps to encourage students to deal effectively with the material of the play:

1. I gave an introductory lecture on four historical constructions of sexual orientation and behavior which related to characters' self-conceptions and representation within the play (see Greenberg (1988), and Dyer (1990)).

2. I suggested changes to questions that students developed that were to start one of the discussion groups. Though I assign groups to develop their own conversation topics for the class, I review the original message they will send to see if they are encouraging discussion in a direction I consider productive.

3. I made participatory and intervening comments during class and added more lengthy comments to the different InterChange discussions after class. In this instance, you could say that I was going beyond the bounds of the real-time discussion framework of InterChange to hold on to my authority; by spending extra time writing comments outside of class, I was maintaining an input greater than that which would be allowed within the 50 minute time-frame of the class.

4. The fourth step I took was to stay out of discussion at times, not merely because this happens automatically with simultaneous conversations, but because students brought up good points and challenged each other in positive ways.

During both semesters when I taught this course, oppositional responses were sent whenever an original student's comment stereotyped gays, lesbians, or bisexuals, or viewed homosexuality as morally wrong.[7] [8] Productive discussions ensued.[9] I noted a consensus-building in the class which was supportive (or defensive) of gay/lesbian/bisexual lifestyles and rights, a consensus which, if not conducive to, was at least not obstructing to students' intellectual engagement with issues of representation and victimization in the narrative of the play.[10] Yet, constant vigilance was necessary to counteract negative remarks in a sensitive and effective

manner.[11] For instance, when a generalization was made about gays and AIDS during the Fall 1992 InterChange, I not only sent a written response in InterChange, but at the beginning of the next class, addressed the students face-to-face around the tables in the middle, to ensure that everyone heard a response to the original comment.

Mary Lenard (1993), another instructor at the University of Texas at Austin, responded similarly when students in her class stereotyped gay men, and directly insulted a gay student in the class.[12] In her course on Writing about Detective Fiction, she had students read over and discuss the InterChange transcript in which these exchanges took place, and did so at the center tables in the middle of the classroom, at the beginning of the following two classes (Lenard, 1993). About this experience, Lenard writes, "it's important not to rely on the technology to solve all your class's communication problems, and it's irresponsible to expect that students are going to be able to resolve issues like this on their own. If I had just let the matter stand with the end of that InterChange, or even if I had just handled it by sending private Mail messages to the "offending" students, I would have been failing in my duty to that class, and especially in my duty to that one student who was insulted and harassed in class" (1993, p.3). She adds that face-to-face discussions are important in following up on issues raised in InterChange (Lenard, 1993, p.3).

The instructor who centralizes discussion by pulling students to the middle of the class and away from their terminals, might appear to be acting according to the dictates of traditional classroom pedagogy, and engaging in "dominating" responses. Yet the interpretation of the meaning of this act and of the exercise of this type of authority is dependent on the situational context, the "kairos" of the computer

classroom. The act or response is staged in a new environment, accruing meaning from the "set" of the networked classroom: the arrangement of chairs, desks, keyboards, and mice, a space which constructs particular sightlines between student and teacher, and most importantly, the monitor and software program itself as the ultimate interactive props, which hold the gaze of students and construct their participation.

To interrupt students while conversing in InterChange, for example, by demanding that their sightlines be directed to you, that the tactile sensation they experience at their fingertips cease, that your voice become the single voice of authority that they hear, that their bodies be re-situated in the chairs at the central tables, is to engage in a relatively dominating action. To begin class this way is less interruptive, perhaps less "dominating," and may even become a convention of one's classroom pedagogy. But while this action may be seen as "dominating," should the associated sense of "totalitarian," uncalled-for, and excessive, be assumed?

In the pedagogical rhetoric of computer-mediated instruction, an analogy is often implied between "totalitarianism" and dominating, strong-arm approaches in which the teacher does not trust students to come up with adequate responses or interpretations; or the association is made between "democracy" and instructor pedagogy which exhibits faith in the consensus of the majority, in a dynamic of interaction with the greatest number of voices producing reasonable interpretations and writing products. Influenced by the rhetoric of technology,[13] such pedagogical rhetoric encourages us to look down on asserting instructor authority in the networked classroom (see Gerrard, 1993, pp. 26-7).

But the pedagogical rhetoric of democratic and free participation in the computer classroom may be turned around. In fact, a strategy of intervention by a teacher to ensure the inclusion of marginalized perspectives may be viewed as "democratic" by those whose viewpoints were not being validated, and by anyone who values a relatively prejudice-free environment. I would encourage the use of traditional, teacher-centered classroom pedagogy to balance, whenever necessary, the supposedly "non-authoritarian" student-centered pedagogy at work in the networked classroom.[14]

1. While teachers have explicitly sought a shift in the teacher's role as authority figure in the computer classroom, some research and practice illustrate a counter-narrative. In an impressive, three-instructor collaborative teaching effort in the computer classroom, for instance, Valerie Balester, Kay Halasek, and Nancy Peterson (1992) set out as a primary aim "to diffuse authority, to share it with one another and with our students" (Balester, Halasek, and Peterson, 1992, p.35). Yet, even with successful results in sharing their authority, they add later that "the realities of instructors evaluating students' work invariably highlight the power differential in any classroom" (Balester et al, 1992, p.36).

Joy Kreeft Peyton's (1990) case study of two teachers emphasizes the role of the electronic classroom instructor as authority figure. Peyton concludes that the "original conception of a revolutionary classroom dynamic was never realized...Social distinctions were not necessarily blurred, shifting the teacher out of the role of authority figure and manager of classroom activity and discussion. Students may have felt more freedom and incentive to send funny or even vulgar or insulting messages when they wanted to, but at least in Harry's class, when the real work started, the teacher called the shots" (1990, p.29).

2. InterChange is a real-time, interactive writing program designed by the Daedalus Group, which is used in both of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition's computer classrooms at the University of Texas. Students have a split-window screen where they compose messages in half of the screen, and send the messages, to appear in a window in the other half of the screen. Class members can scroll through the conversation, or leave one conversation to participate in another, and then return later. The discussion may be set up for students to use their real names or pseudonyms.

The Division of Rhetoric and Composition has two computer classrooms: one consisting of 24 IBM computers linked in a token ring in a Novell network, and the other having 24 Mac computers in an Apple Share network linked by Ethernet. The computers in both classrooms are placed on long tables and face the walls. In the middle of the classrooms, tables are set up, facing inward in a square. Students face each other and the teacher when sitting at these tables.

All computers are linked to the Internet so that students have access to electronic mail, newsgroups, discussions lists, international talk progams (the IRC, Internet Relay Chat), and library and computer stations worldwide, if teachers choose to incorporate Internet assignments in their curriculum.

3. This model might similarly be used to locate student responses to their own and the instructor's comments in InterChange.

4. In relation to setting up the topic for a networked discussion, Locke Carter discusses the instructor's use of specific directions or comments to "seed" an InterChange (personal communication, March 28, 1993). The seed in this instance would be the words or situation students are supposed to respond to at the

beginning of an InterChange, which might also be developed in a class assignment indicating the direction of analysis on a particular day.

5. While both Marshall Kremers (1990) and Peter Elbow valorize a teacherless classroom with less closure on meaning in class discussion, and encourage pluralistic voices bringing out multiple viewpoints, Kim Emery (1993) discusses the potential drawbacks of such enhanced participation. Says Emery, "Yes, students unlikely to speak up in a conventional classroom will often take part in networked discussions. This does not, however, guarantee that the kind of "heterogeneous conversation" crucial to collaborative learning will take place. ...productive "heterogeneity" is indexed not simply by who "speaks," but by what gets said...Homophobia is both widespread and widely accepted in U.S. culture; therefore arrangements which enable "free" discussion of topics touching on homosexuality often, in fact, "empower" expressions of homophobia--and homophobia works to silence the expression of sexual difference" (1993, April, p.1).

6. In the computer classroom, I have taught two semesters of English 309, an elective writing class, and two semesters of English 306, a Rhetoric and Composition course. In my classes, I use small group assignments where students work and talk with each other face-to-face, and I encourage students to learn each other's names and converse with their neighbors about computer functions. When they write in the InterChange program, they are often speaking aloud with their neighbors, commenting on what is being written. I also have them use their real names for all but a final InterChange discussion (during the final one, they comment on the course).

The amount of time they spend on the computers varies. One day they may spend the majority of the class writing on the computers, and the next, 30 minutes on an assignment in the middle of the class, with the last 20 minutes spent on computers. We usually begin class in the middle of the room and go over the day's assignment and their questions. If I lecture, I bring in a chalkboard, take them down the hall to a different room, or more commonly these days, compile my notes in written form and have the lecture material presented in a class assignment document they see when they start to work at their machines.

7. While oppositional comments are sometimes overlooked as effective forms of resistance in interpretations of discussion program transcripts, Cooper and Selfe (1990) avoid this tendency in an examination of a computer discussion in an upper-level writing course. They describe how a campus issue elicited "the most heated exchanges" when it touched on attitudes toward homosexuality (Cooper and Selfe, 1990, p.864). They note that in this conference, two students' comments, which were indicative of what Cooper and Selfe describe as "fundamentalist discourse" about homosexuality, proceeded to become the "target of quite a bit of direct and indirect criticism" (1990, pp.865-6). The oppositional comments are recognized as an important component in gauging class sentiment. The narrative about this same series of exchanges would be very different if the authors had chosen to focus on the homophobic comments without stressing the oppositional messages that were sent.

In the Fall 1992 semester of my elective writing course, English 309, discussion participants questioned and challenged each other on their perspectives in a conference with the lead question (developed by students): In the play, Max uses concealment to cope with the way society reacts to homosexuality. Do you feel that this was the correct way to deal with the situation or do you feel that he should have dealt with it in other ways? How do you deal with the homosexuals in today's society? Do you feel that their concealment is necessary or not? Also discuss the ways in which Max deals with the others (Greta, Freddie,etc.) and how they deal with him.

In this conference, two threads of messages elicit challenging "oppositional" responses or comments asking for clarification (student names have been changed in the following, and "[...]" indicates responses are being skipped):

[...] Isabel Garcia:
Howdy! To answer Mark, I feel like those who are homosexual or bisexual should not conceal their desires. However, I would not want any of their actions to impose on other people. If someone is affected by the actions of homosexuals, then they become victims. If a person chooses to be homosexually active they should not be ashamed about their actions.
[...]
Veronica Rodriguez:
Isabel: What kind of actions by homosexuals can impose on or affect other people.

John Wood:
But what about the actions of the hetrosexual society imposing their beliefs on the homosexuals or the bisexuals, should the hetro sexuals be ashamed of their actions?

Susan Warshauer:
Isabel, how do you mean that people (non-homosexual I presume) would be victimized by homosexuals affecting their actions? In what way do you mean they're affecting non-homosexuals' actions?

In another exchange within this conference, consensus-building occurs from different vantage points:

Isabel Garcia:
To those who say that heterosexuals may impose on homosexuals that is true also. BUT, if you look at history, the decisions and ways of life are usually made by the majority. Homosexuals are not in the majority in most cities (although there are alot here in Austin). If our society continues to create homosexual relationships there will be a tremendous increase in our most feared disease today-AIDS. There will also be little recreation occuring. I don't mean to sound like some holy roller, but God created us to live as images of him

[One could view the following speaker, Jane, as attempting to build consensus with Isabel, yet at the same time, Jane anticipates broader class criticism for her view]:
Jane Rune:

Actually on a different level, one I'm sure people will disagree with, is personally I think homosexuality is a result of a chemical imbalance. In a way I think the whole subject is very interesting even though it repulses me to no end. I worked with someone that was bisexual and she told me the whole reason she engaged in homosexual activity was because of insecurity. She said she had had so many relationships with men who treated her badly that she found herself afraid of men and liking women for not only their values but intimate relationships as well. Kind of gives a whole new perspective, huh?

John Wood:
Isabel--
Since it is the homos that is the cause of AIDS how do you explain that it is the heteros in the age group of 18-24 that has the highest rate of AIDS cases showing as the fastest growing population of Anyone!

Veronica Rodriguez:
Jane-
How can you justify that your co-worker's insecurity is a result of a chemical imbalance that makes her bisexual? Come on, I think a lot of people have chemical imbalances, but I don't think they're homosexual, actually I think their missing a few screws in their heads.

Howard Nessel:
Isabel-
I don't believe that homos are the cause of aids. However, they are the victim of this deadly disease.

Susan Warshauer:
Isabel, I would question the idea that an acceptance or increase in homosexual relationships will lead to an increase in the number of people with AIDS. The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which leads to the condition called AIDS, is transmitted through sexual behavior (body secretions, blood), blood transfusion, etc., not through being a particular kind of person. To suggest that being gay would lead one to having AIDS perpetuates the idea that this is only a disease affecting gay people, and allows a false sense of security for others. The association of AIDS with gay people also overlooks that lesbians as a group have been least affected by AIDS, if one was looking at group factors alone (rather than behavior, which is the more appropriate category when considering HIV transmission). Basically, gay men were hit hard by this epidemic in its early stages but there is no causal relationship between being gay and testing positive for H.I.V. The majority of people in the world with H.I.V. disease (a term covering the time from when a person tests positive for H.I.V. to development of AIDS) are heterosexuals.

Susan Warshauer:
Jane, many people discuss the origins/cause of homosexuality and these causes

have sometimes been put into the nature vs. nurture framework. [a long explanation follows]...

8. Yet a significant factor accounting for this productive opposition may well be the particular set of students in a class. In another example, Alison Regan (Regan, in press), describes an instance when a majority-consensus is built around homophobia rather than opposition to its workings. When homophobic comments were made in the computer conference in the course she taught, Regan found that students were "less likely to offer oppositional perspectives. There is little conflict; instead, what I saw was consensus building, where the consensus view championed homophobia" (in press). Regan concludes that "we need to rethink our rhetoric of computer-mediated liberation and find new ways to ensure that we provide our students with an open and accessible forum...in which differences are acknowledged and respected" (in press).

9. To gauge student perceptions of how productive discussions and the course in general had been, I conducted an informal survey of student responses from my Fall 1992 course three months after the class was over. I told them that computer technology had been interpreted as being anything from liberating to alienating when used in course instruction, and asked them how they viewed the technology. I also asked if they thought African-American, Mexican-American, and Asian-American students for instance, or gay/lesbian/bisexual students, would be comfortable or uncomfortable in the computer classroom, and why.

I should say that the reactions I got from the particular students I contacted are undeniably skewed as they used computers (and the Internet) more frequently than other students; because I had their e-mail addresses still, they were the easiest to contact.

In the Fall 1992 course I taught, I had 13 students: 3 gay/bisexual, 1 lesbian, 9 heterosexual; 6 women, 7 men; 1 African-American, 5 Mexican-American, and 7 Euro-American.

Brian Todd, a heterosexual, African-American student responded that he would "tend to agree" that the computer classroom was "liberating" to certain ethnic, or minority groups. He writes, "My experience with the computer classroom was one where I felt a freedom to freely express what I was thinking and how I felt. I believe that the reason I felt this freedom was because I was interacting with my fellow students through a medium that gave the sense of ***anonymity***. Therefore, I was not as worried about the societal taboos of speaking what was really on my mind. As the semester progressed, the tone that was set during the early stages of respecting each others opinions remained constant, and as a result, I was able to witness the coming out of a gay student (over the computer), and then witness, the acceptance that he enjoyed from the class."

"To be balanced, I should point out that I believe that this is the result of the make up of the class and is not a primary function of the computer resources. ...It is conceivable that the tone that was taken by the class could have been one that was restrictive of ideas; ridiculing any idea, thought, or expression which deviated from a narrow norm. Under these circumstances, I believe that the ethnic and minority students would feel isolated and powerless."

"But please note; the possibility of either of these scenarios to happen exist, and if the computer classroom plays any role in deciding which one will occur, I believe that it will tend to bias the result towards liberating due to the anonymity at the beginning of the semester."

Veronica Rodriguez, another student from the Fall 1992 course, also responded. Rodriguez, a Mexican-American and lesbian student, writes: "I personally feel that the CA(Computer-Assisted)-class gave the students an opportunity to express their own personal feelings without the anxiety that sometimes comes with having to speak in front of a room full of students....I have a government class in a regular classroom that requires verbal participation from the students or else you suffer the possibility of having your grade lowered. Even then, some students still haven't spoken in front of the class. So, I definitely feel that the CA-classroom is more liberating for students to express themselves."

"Whether you are in a computer classroom or in a regular classroom, someone with an ethnic and social background that is different than the norm will always feel uncomfortable, especially when offensive comments are made. I think that some students might be more hesitant to make derogatory comments towards a person with a different ethnic background in a regular classroom because they have the advantage of being able to see who they are talking to. You might not get this same advantage in a CA classroom, but our class was small enough so that we were able to know each other on a personal level. So, it wasn't like we didn't know what we were going to get ourselves into by typing something that might offend someone's feelings concerning their ethnicity.

"However, for those students who are homosexual in either a regular classroom or in a CA classroom, the feeling of oppression is always present because there really is no way for heterosexuals to detect if you are or aren't gay, and for those who make ignorant and offensive comments about homosexuals, these people can make derogatory comments without even knowing that there is a gay person in the same room. I personally felt that I had more courage to defend the gay community on the interchange network than I would have in a regular classroom. Issues facing the gay community in the class didn't make me uncomfortable, instead it gave me an opportunity to explain to others what it is like to be gay, and it gave heterosexuals the opportunity to know what gay people have to put up with."

10. In one conference in the Fall 1992 class, where consensus is built among several students in support of homosexuals showing affection in public if heterosexuals do (the conference question asks if there is a difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals showing affection on stage or in society, and whether "too much" affection can be shown), a student alludes to the "opinions of the class" in a positive manner, and says that he "came out" several years earlier:
John Wood:
I can tell by the opinions of the class that the societal norms are changing since I "came out" four years ago. If these questions would of been asked to the general population then the person would have been ostercized. I'm glad for the progression.
Ellen-I work at the [a gay club in Austin].

11. I should add that students were assisted in their efforts to build consensus in opposition to homophobic comments by the additional contact they had in the inter-class Mail program, which is part of the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment software, and in their links to the Internet, which was accessible during class. The inter-class Mail program served the gay/lesbian/bisexual students especially well as a site to connect with each other. In one instance, Mail became a spill-over area to further develop points which were made during the InterChange conversations. One student writes:

From Sergio Ortiz to John Wood 10/7

re: questions on interchange

I was looking over the InterChange from Mon & last Wed. I noticed that you made some entries after I wrote something in. I was wondering maybe they were questions to me or rhetorical ones. If they were rhetorical, well then I'll just put in my two cents.

The first question was "Do you feel that homosexuals are treated differently for doing things that are the norm for normal people?" ...I've been thinking about that since....Frankly, I'm confused. What would a homosexual do like a heterosexual and still be treated differently? You mean, if I danced with a girl, or kissed a girl, would I be treated differently? [I'm family too, by the way.] How would I be treated differently? I don't think I would. Because that's "the norm." However, if I tried to get a license to get married with another guy, then I do think I'd be treated differently. ...The other question from the "Display of Affection" InterChange, you asked "So how would you feel if I told you that you needed to leave the bar for engaging in heterosexual activities in a gay bar?" I didn't know that that was the policy at the [gay club]. It threw me off for a second. You mean if I kissed a girl at the [club], you would ask me to stop or leave? What if I said, "But John, I'm family!"? I guess it's an all right policy, but I kind of agree with Susan from InterChange that "it would be unfortunate to replicate the idea that certain types of affection aren't acceptable."...

So in short: * the club policy is a little odd. The double standard is a nice way to turn the tables around, but it's never right. *however, gay bars are for that reason--for homosexuals to feel "at home." Every issue has another side to look at. And everyone has to deal with the duality of everything. All of us.

While this student did not make it known in the InterChange conversation that he was "family," he writes it in a message to a fellow student, but one without a private security code on, so over half the students in the class read it.

Another student, having learned that John works at a particular gay club, writes him a Mail message which the majority of the class also reads, in which she makes it apparent that she frequents the bar:

From Veronica Rodriguez to John 10/21

Concerning club

Is there any chance that the cost of $7 will go down any time soon? Or will I be paying $7 til I'm twenty-one?

By the end of the semester, John has managed to get Veronica a special pass to the club and a total of four students have identified themselves to each other as being gay/lesbian/bisexual in the Mail program.

In addition to using the Mail system for posting messages individual students found interesting, they also started "class polls" (such as, "What do you think of gay marriage?"; "What did you wear for Halloween?"; "What's your favorite late night snack after getting drunk?"; "What's everybody's pet peeve?"), and a contest to identify movie and author quotes.

In one Mail message, a student shares an account of a message that he received by e-mail with a fellow student who has become his friend over the course of the semester:

From Sergio Ortiz to John 11/4
Concerning oregon #9

My friend from San Antonio wrote me an e-mail message this morning and told me that Oregon #9 didn't pass. He said he was so happy that he cried. And with Clinton in the office, I'm curious to see what kind of changes are going to happen for homosexuals in the future.

Though this message is addressed to a particular individual, it does not have a private security lock on, so half the class reads it. In another message from this student though, the security lock is on, and he is encouraging Veronica to join a conversation he and John have been participating in on the Internet:

From Sergio Ortiz To Veronica Rodriguez 11/16
Concerning get back!

Veronica, get back on the line! Then I can show you how to get on the Gay, Lesbian, & Friends net. Or John can show you. He's a regular, you know.

With Internet capabilities, the electronic community moves beyond the classroom to expand the sense of community for students.

12. The students in Lenard's Spring 1993 class had seen John Huston's movie version of Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon, and were instructed to discuss the violence in the film. In relation to a scene where the Peter Lorre character in the movie, Joel Cairo, gets beaten up by the detective, Sam Spade, one of the students writes: "I thought Cairo liked getting slapped around by Spade. After all, he's the first homosexual gunman, isn't he?"(Lenard, 1993, p.2). Lenard says that the only openly gay student in the class responded, "So___, are you saying that fags like getting slapped around? I don't" (1993, p.2). Lenard (1993) notes that a thread of homophobic comments followed. At the end of the class, for example, one student sent a comment in InterChange to the gay student which said, "____[the gay student's name], go get you some Cairo" (personal communication, July 19, 1993).

13. Gail Hawisher and Cindy Selfe (1990) describe the "rhetoric of technology," one of "hope, vision," a "visionary image of technology--what we want technology to do" (1990, p.7), which is "disguised in the objective rhetoric of research or observation" (1990, p.8). They write that the rhetoric of technology, which characterizes discourse on computer use in the classroom, "veil[s] narratives about the best moments and the best characteristics of electronic applications" (Hawisher & Selfe, 1990, p.8).

14. The existence of a discreet, decentralized pedagogy in the networked classroom, as distinct from traditional classroom pedagogy, is rightly questioned by Elizabeth Klem and Charles Moran (1992). They challenge the assumption that teacher pedagogy shifts merely because of a change in technology. From their study of two teachers and their classes in the computer classroom, Klem and Moran conclude that "computer technology, of and by itself, does not magically change the ways in which we teach. If we believe that we should teach writing by lecturing, or by oral recitation, or by large-group, offline discussions, then we will use these teaching strategies in a computer-equipped classroom, despite the architecture and equipment of our classrooms" (Klem & Moran, p.20).

Certainly, the rhetoric of the classroom design and the particular software being used should not be discounted, but neither should the cultural and pedagogical background of the people who use the computers and inhabit the space. Bruce Bertram and Andee Rubin (1993) write that, "One fallacy is to assume that an innovation per se causes changes; the converse fallacy is to assume that the operation of an innovation is always subsumed by existing cultural practices and that its details are irrelevant to the issue of social change" (1993, p.217).

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